Two articles about the cathartic killing of a United Healthcare CEO and widespread support for the alleged shooter, Luigi Mangione

Another way out: The propaganda of violence

William C. Anderson - PrismReports.org

The killing of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson on the morning of Dec. 4 may have shocked people for several reasons. A masked gunman committing a targeted killing with tactical precision before making an illusive escape stunned authorities and captured the imaginations of others, offering him instant celebrity status. Gunning down an insurance executive became a cathartic scene with all the trappings of cause célèbre. The initial reaction should be analyzed to understand what it communicates to us. This sort of violence holds a special place in the history of insurrectionary anarchism, which has not only theorized about it but actively practiced it to world-changing ends. A killing is not just a killing, and the popular reaction to the shooter can supply us with some important lessons just as police close in on a suspect. If the authorities are not careful with this case, they may end up uniting people behind common interests. Now is a good time to observe the history of class warfare, grievance, and the classic anarchist militancy of a form of direct action meant to catalyze revolution, known as "the propaganda of the deed."

In 1885, the Chicago Tribune quoted the formerly enslaved Black anarchist Lucy Parsons saying something many wouldn't dare say almost 150 years later: *"Let every dirty, lousy tramp arm himself with a revolver or knife and lay in wait on the steps of the palaces of the rich and stab or shoot the owners as they come out. Let us kill them without mercy, and let it be a war of extermination and without pity."* Far beyond a mere call for sporadic violence, it's essential to understand that the impulse to make such a confrontational statement was not so unconventional back then. Different factions of anarchists used calls for revolutionary violence toward different ends and influenced one another.

While some, like Parsons, worked with organizations like the International Working People's Association (IWPA), doing pivotal work to transform labor conditions, others had individual motives based on self-organized immediate interventions. The historian Paul Avrich noted that the violent rhetoric of anarchists like Parsons attracted the "skilled and unskilled, employed and unemployed" based on the " hopes of immediate redemption." However, some people took that mandate into their own hands, targeting some of the world's most powerful elites.

Anarchists went after and often successfully assassinated multiple heads of state, politicians, businessmen, military figures, and police around the world under the proclamation of propaganda by the deed. The idea that killing reviled and oppressive authority figures would be a catalyst for revolution has long been debated. These ideas are not limited to just one faction of anarchists or only the anarchist segments of the historical socialist and communist movements. Furthermore, their effectiveness often produced unintended consequences that the purveyors couldn't have necessarily predicted. For example, when a self-professed anarchist killed President William McKinley in 1901, it led to the creation of the FBI and a proto-"war on terror" that reshaped international policing and worldwide immigration policy and nearly destroyed anarchism. Understanding this in the context of Thompson's killing in New York should let

us know that the ruling class won't simply accept this. The protectors of their interests and property, the police, will do their bidding to make an example of the killer (or a necessary scapegoat). Authorities will also be hard at work deciding what agencies, legislation, or punishment should be meted out to stop lethal direct action from becoming too popular. Just as it has been throughout anarchist history, quashing such jubilance and excitement about the collective awakening to the possibilities of violent resistance will be necessary.

Anarchist proponents of violence like Errico Malatesta, Johann Most, and Luigi Galleani saw attacks as a necessary response to the oppression of the working class, immigrants, poor people, and the enslaved. Even Alexander Berkman, who wrote about the anarchist movement's departure from the propaganda of the deed, attempted to assassinate the industrialist oligarch Henry Clay Frick who turned guns on workers and was tyrannical in his business practices. Berkman once wrote, *"You don't question the right of the government to kill, to confiscate and imprison. If a private person should be guilty of the things the government is doing all the time, you'd brand him a murderer, thief and scoundrel. But as long as the violence committed is 'lawful,' you approve of it and submit to it. So it is not really violence that you object to, but to people using violence 'unlawfully.'"*

Berkman's nearly 100-year-old perspective still holds, though what's interesting now is seeing a murder bring people together. Anarchist history shows that sometimes it's unexpectedly hard to find a prominent figure so universally reviled that nearly everyone celebrates their ending. Though many have prefaced their commentary on the current moment with the need to say they don't "condone" violence, Berkman's point bites back at inconsistency. The monopoly on violence known as "the state" conducts regular killing both directly and indirectly the world over daily to maintain itself. Also, do those who don't condone the killing of a businessman by a vigilante announce they don't "condone" violence before using their conflict mineral technologies with apps that use artificial intelligence powered by slave labor? Do they announce that they don't condone violence when they pay taxes to fund a genocidal onslaught or militarism that destroys the planet? What about the violence on our plates in our food or in the "fast fashion" we wear? No, that inescapable violence is accepted as ordinary and not worth showy moralizing statements.

Those who denounce killing in response to the shooting of Thompson reinforce the imbalance that upholds oppression. Blood has different weights depending on where it spills from. Who has the power to kill as an acceptable norm versus who doesn't is what tips the scale. The gravity given to those this society privileges, empowers, and prioritizes dictates how much we're supposed to care about deaths. It also dictates what's even considered violent. That's why we are instructed to mindlessly condemn any and every act of violence that threatens the status quo of capitalism, imperialism, and class-based society. We should be able to respect those who choose not to practice violence while distancing ourselves from those who make false equivalencies out of it. Their "peace" comes at the expense of the most abused, whose screams are drowned out. This is the *"peace of the pharaohs, the peace of the tsars, the peace of the Caesars,"* as Ricardo

Flores Magón once wrote and rightly concluded, *"Let such a peace be damned!"*

It would be helpful if more of us accepted the fact that we cannot indeed be anti-violence in a society where even our most passive actions are reinforcing the most deplorable crimes against oppressed people around the globe. This is why I've argued that we should identify the counterviolence we need in our politics. So, rather than projecting onto a mysterious shooter or endlessly looking for a hero to venerate, the questions of the utility of violence here are answered by past instruction. However, I do not invoke all this history and quotation to suggest it's inherently instructive for mimicry. Instead, I think it helps us realize that there is something beneath the surface here that people yearn for. There's a confrontation dying to be taken up by those who refuse to wait for more tragedy and endless pain. Such a clash isn't expected to be neat, nice, or consistently nonviolent. If force is the tool used to shape our subjugation, then pushing that oppressive momentum back so that we can completely throw it off of us should be the standard.

Assassination As An Anarchist Tactic

Anonymous submission to Montreal Counter-info, MTLCounterInfo.org

This is a raw, underdeveloped reflection on why political assassinations of CEOs, politicians, slumlords, etc., should happen more often. The assassination of UnitedHealthCare Executive CEO, Brian Thompson left me spiralling in a myriad of unexpected ways, mostly around these two questions: why doesn't this happen more often? And perhaps, why do anarchists seemingly no longer do this?

Assassinations are primarily political. They are a radical act resulting from either a political analysis of power, or a threat to the order of it. Police, state, and corporations commit assassinations but they use their justice systems to legitimate them.

I find myself so hesitant to discuss with some of my most trusted, beloved comrades. It feels so taboo. What has liberal democratic propaganda done to anarchism that makes the topic of assassination so uncomfortable to talk about it as a rationale and reasonable act? Even if we hate to admit it, non-violence has a more pervasive creep than many of us are willing to admit.

In some circles, I hear a lot of people talk about the necessity of violence, but I'm not sure if it's anything more than a romanticized notion of it. The experience of committing violence against one's adversary is many things, though it often comes with a rush of adrenaline, sometimes a fleeting sense of euphoria, but it can also come with nausea, shock, and the intuitive feeling that with every act of violence a piece of one's self is forever changed.

And at the same time, what the fuck world? We've been shown that the legal system is a joke. We know laws are made for the most powerful. We know that politicians don't care about systemic change, but rather, they are more invested in the maintenance of capital and state order albeit with different takes depending on

the political party. We know demonstrations alone don't work, we know breaking windows or setting an executive's car on fire isn't enough to deter or intimidate, so what is one left with to do? What is left to be done so that when one says, "no, this will not happen any longer," and acts accordingly, it happens no longer?

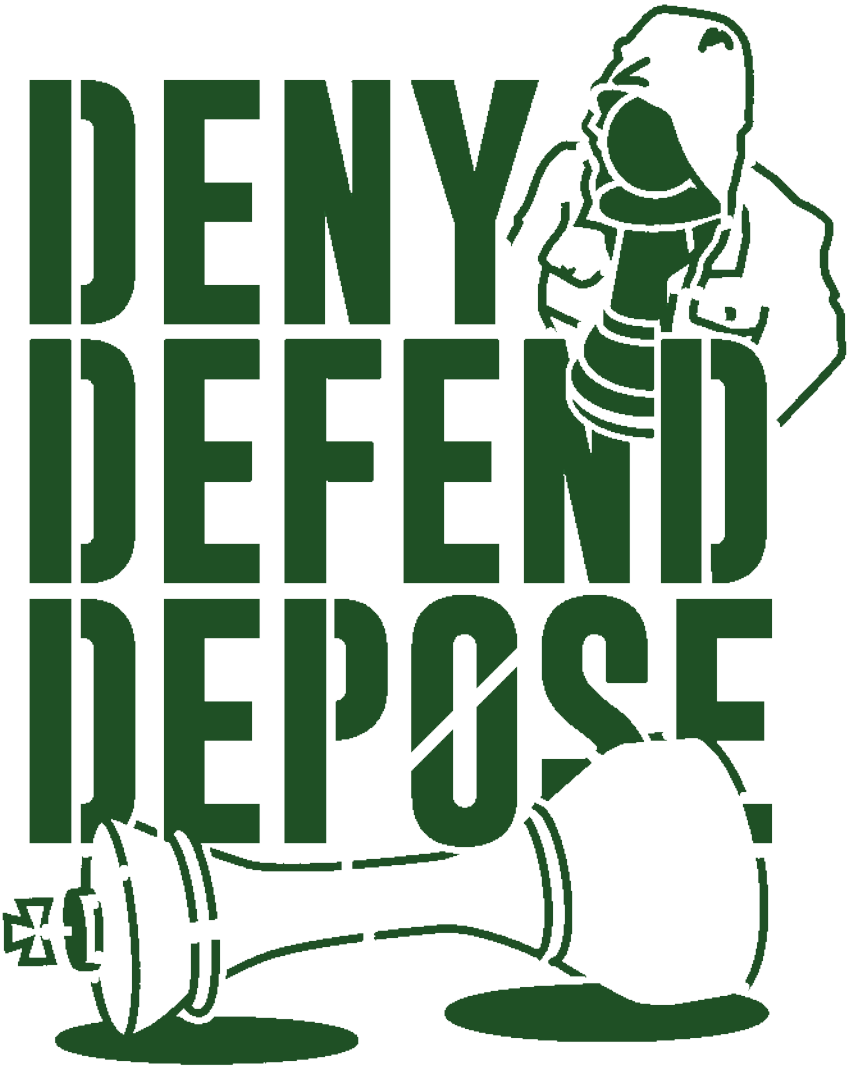
Those who have power and shape the socio-political terrain of this world will not step aside peacefully. We are fucking delusional if we think that another petition, demo, vigil, frontline is going to change anything. While friends and comrades caught RICO charges from the Stop Cop City struggle, Donald Trump caught the same charges and became President, again!

The state uses the police to back multibillion dollar projects. We cannot win when we try to stand against them as equal opponents, even in asymmetrical attacks the outcomes are grim. But if the heads of corporations, etc were killed, one by one, think of the way their networks would implode into chaos because of the fear and knowledge that they are no longer untouchable? They can be found. I'm not saying that assassinations are the only thing left to do. I'm just wondering aloud into the anarchist universe as to why this tactic is used more by the state, the police, etc., and less by individuals who understand/ experience the harm and greed of certain individuals who just need to die.

Millions of people applauded the recent assassination of UHC CEO Thompson, they also applauded the most recent assassination attempt of Trump. We are on a precipice. I want those reading this text to seriously examine their relationship to violence. Ask yourself and trusted friends, "how far are you/ am I willing to go?" Would you know the conditions necessary for that relationship to change or intensify? Or, do you provide endless justifications as to why a tactic of accelerated violence won't make a difference. Be honest. Sometimes we say such things because we are just afraid of the consequences of getting caught or failing. When we are honest about our fears we can make plans to move beyond them. What things would you need in place to feel like you could increase your capacity to act violently? And to that end, to commit an assassination?

Assassinations are an anarchist tactic. The following is a list of known anarchist assassins – definitely incomplete – who decided that this was a viable tactic throughout history. Wikipedia has pages on each of them:

Michele Angiolillo - Milan Arsov - Joëlle Aubron - Germaine Berton - Georgi Bogdanov - Dmitrii Bogrov - Marko Boshnakov - Gaetano Bresci - Arthur Caron - Sante Geronimo Caserio - Georges Cipriani - Alfredo Luís da Costa - Leon Czolgosz - Buenaventura Durruti - Vladimir Gaćinović - Herman Helcher - Émile Henry (anarchist) - Liu Shifu - Gino Lucetti - Luigi Lucheni - Paulí Pallàs - Manuel Pardiñas - Giovanni Passannante - Yordan Popyordanov - Antonio Ramón - Ravachol - Gennaro Rubino - Santiago Salvador - Alexandros Schinas - Sholem Schwarzbard - Oleksandr Semenyuta - Jean-Baptiste Sipido - Sergey Stepnyak-Kravchinsky - Moishe Tokar - Kurt Gustav Wilckens - Wong Sau Ying - Vera Zasulich - Bogdan Žerajić



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In other words: Think for yourself.

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